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ABSTRACT

Reporting on educational conditions and facilities for children in isolated areas of Australia, this document presents findings and recommendations submitted by the Australian Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts as per their two-year investigation. Areas considered in this report are: extent of the problem; schools in isolated areas (primary, secondary, and multiracial); boarding facilities (independent boarding schools, agricultural high schools, private board and second homes, Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme, and state government assistance); education by correspondence (primary, secondary, and pre-school; schools of the air; television and video cassettes; and commonwealth government's correspondence allowances); special education; and transportation and conveyance allowances. The recommendations suggest that: rural primary school teachers have at least one year's previous teaching experience in a larger school; small primary schools be given improved facilities and teaching materials and additional financial assistance; teacher-pupil ratios in small secondary schools be reduced and promotional incentives for teachers be considered; educational policy in the Northern Territory be reviewed to ensure equal education for Aboriginal and European children; the responsibilities of the Commonwealth and State governments be clarified; correspondence students have access to trained personnel and diagnostic facilities. (JC)

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EDUCATION OF ISOLATED SCHOOL CHILDREN

Report of the Australian Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts. July 1976.

The report on educational conditions and facilities for children in isolated areas of Australia was compiled over a two-year period. The Committee relied on interviews and submissions from people involved in or influenced by the education of isolated children. Chairman of the Committee was Senator G.S. Davidson, and Committee members included Senator J.N. Button, Senator S.J. Collard, Senator K.J. Martin, Senator E.A. Robertson and Senator S.M. Ryan. Several other Senators served on the Committee during the course of the inquiry, but are not presently members of the Committee. These Senators are Senator the Hon. J.L. Carrick, Senator G. Georges, Senator G.C. Hannan, Senator the Hon. J.R. McClelland, the late Senator B.R. Milliner and Senator D.B. Scott.

INTRODUCTION

Terms of Reference

In 1972, the Senate resolved that there be referred to the Standing Committee on Education, Science and the Arts, the following matters:

1. The means by which 'isolated school children', i.e. children who, for geographic reasons, have no reasonable daily access to an appropriate school
   (a) can be afforded equal educational opportunity with other children not so situated; and
   (b) can be provided with an education suitable to the children's talents and interests, which will equip them for employment in the occupational field which they select.
2. The means by which these disabilities can be overcome whether by extension and deployment more widely of schools or institutes of tertiary education, the provision of financial aid to such children or otherwise.

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Categories of Children Defined as 'Isolated'

The Committee took account of the following categories of children in its definition of 'isolated school children':

1. Those children who do not have daily access to any school facilities because of the remoteness of their homes;
2. Those children living in sparsely populated areas who could be conveyed to school daily but whose numbers are insufficient to warrant the provision of a school bus;
3. Those children living in areas where no secondary school is available and whose homes are beyond bus range of the nearest secondary school; (while these children may have access to a small primary school, on reaching secondary level they must board away from home for their education or undertake their secondary education by correspondence under the supervision of a primary teacher.)
4. Those children attending a small school where one teacher supervises a number of pupils in different grades;
5. Those children attending a country high school which does not offer courses at senior secondary level and where there is no full high school within daily reach by bus;
6. Those children travelling excessive distances by private vehicle and/or school bus over unsealed or unformed roads where such travel imposes hardship on children

or their parents, and children whose access to schools is affected by adverse weather conditions or difficult terrain;

7. Children of itinerant or seasonal workers whose frequent changes of domicile render it impracticable for them to attend school regularly;
8. Children who require remedial instruction and who do not have access to special education facilities in their region; and
9. Children suffering from short-term or long-term illnesses and physical or mental disabilities who are isolated from appropriate education facilities by necessary confinement to their homes or to hospitals and other institutions.

While recognising that children of Aboriginal descent account for a large proportion of Australia's isolated school population, the Committee decided that because of the unique problems inherent in the provision of education for Aboriginal children, it would be preferable to conduct a separate inquiry into Aboriginal education. The Committee also decided to confine the inquiry to the pre-school, primary and secondary levels of education, encompassing the age groups from early childhood to adolescence. It considered that the matter of the provision of post-secondary education facilities to serve the inhabitants of isolated areas of Australia could be more effectively examined in a separate inquiry into tertiary education.

Extent of the Problem

During the course of the inquiry, it became evident to the Committee that the provision of education for isolated school children is a matter which requires extensive and systematic investigation on a national basis.

Until the introduction of the Commonwealth Government's Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme in 1973, it was difficult to estimate the number of isolated school children in Australia, as the eligibility criteria for allocating allowances under the State assistance schemes varied from State to State. The allocation of grants on a national basis under the Commonwealth Government's scheme now gives a fairly accurate estimate of the number of children involved. However, while the Committee acknowledges the need for eligibility criteria governing payment of allowances under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme, it considers that the existing definition of an isolated child excludes a significant number of children who, irrespective of distance, are isolated from school facilities by such factors as lack of transport services, poor roads, inaccessible terrain and weather conditions which, at times, render roads impassable.

Australian Department of Education statistics show that in 1975 there were approximately 20 000 children receiving financial assistance under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme. However, the view has been put before the Committee that these figures are not all-inclusive and that there is a further number of isolated children who are not receiving Commonwealth Government assistance because they do not meet eligibility criteria. Some of these may be receiving State Government assistance. The Committee has also heard some reports of isolated families who are not aware of their eligibility for financial assistance from the Commonwealth Government. The figure of 20 000 does not include the large number of Aboriginal children living in remote areas. These children receive government assistance for educational purposes under a separate scheme administered by the Australian Department of Education.

Although the majority of isolated children are located in the semi-arid inland areas of Australia, isolated families are also found in the Western Australian mining fields, the Bass Strait Islands and the Australian Alps. There is also a significant number of children whose families are not engaged in rural industries. Isolated groups are engaged in a wide range of other occupations in remote localities. There are also certain groups who are seasonally isolated.

There is no doubt from the submissions received and the evidence taken by the Committee that a serious problem does exist. For the individual, it is an educational problem since, in most cases, the isolated child receives a restricted formal secondary education because of the limited range of subjects available at small schools in country areas or under the correspondence system. For the family, it can be an emotional problem when parents are compelled to send children away to school at an early age or when stress is placed on those mothers who lack confidence in adopting the teaching role. It is also a social problem because some parents believe that the limited education facilities available result in a generally lower level of formal education, and a significant proportion of the isolated population is moving from rural areas to the cities to ensure that their children are not educationally disadvantaged.

The problem of isolation from school facilities has become prominent for several reasons. The rising educational expectations of the Australian community in general have been shared by those people living in remote areas. The decline in rural incomes has meant that a significant proportion of the rural population who were accustomed to sending their children away to independent boarding schools can no longer afford to do so. There is also an increasing awareness that lack of education is a limiting factor in occupational mobility at a time when the economic climate in rural areas often necessitates the choice of a non-rural oriented career.

SCHOOLS IN ISOLATED AREAS

The Isolated Primary School

Many isolated areas are served by small schools with one or two teachers. There are 53 600 pupils throughout Australia in the 2000 one and two-teacher schools. The number of these schools has been greatly reduced over the last decade, as increasingly efficient bus services have taken isolated children to regional centres, so that attendances in small schools have dwindled. The schools in the towns are usually better equipped and offer the child opportunity equal to his non-isolated peer.

However, it is undesirable that all one and two-teacher schools should be closed. Many children live too far from a town or centre to travel the distance daily. It is argued that education facilities should be available to children within reasonable distance of their homes. It is necessary for the isolated child to have the opportunity for contact with other children and with his teacher and to be able to participate in extra-curricular sport, excursions and other activities outside of school time. Should he live too far from his school, the isolated child is totally excluded from this dimension of education and school life. Thus the maintenance of the service provided by the small school is important.

Staffing of these schools is a problem. It is difficult to attract experienced teachers to remote areas where they will be geographically, professionally and socially isolated. Hence, teachers in these areas are usually junior and inexperienced. The Committee suggests that extra incentive should be offered to attract teachers – incentives such as extra leave, increased travel allowances, provision of adequate housing and better working conditions with provision of more teaching aids and materials.

The Committee makes *three recommendations* relating to isolated primary schools:

1. *That teachers appointed to small schools in remote localities have at least one year's previous teaching experience at a larger school;*
2. *That small primary schools in isolated areas be provided with improved physical facilities and allocated special funds for the acquisition of appropriate teaching aids and materials;* and
3. *That additional financial assistance be made available to such schools so that educational excursions can be undertaken to widen the social and cultural experiences of isolated children.*

Secondary Schools

Secondary schooling is more specialised than primary, and therefore modern facilities are limited in remote areas. The current solution of education authorities is to provide secondary schools in regional centres where a sufficient number of students will attend to warrant provision of specialised staff and facilities. For many of the isolated students attending school, it is necessary to board in the town due to the distance of the family home from the town. Others who live closer to the centre have to travel by bus, but this excludes them from extra-curricular activities.

The number of children in a school depends on the size of the town and how many children come in from surrounding districts. The number of pupils at the school dictates the number of teachers allocated to the school. This decides the number and variety of courses available.

In many areas, declining enrolments has led to the loss of teaching staff, which in turn has meant a reduction in the courses and subjects taught. These limitations have caused many parents to decide to send their children in secondary school to metropolitan boarding schools, or alternatively, to keep the children at home to study through the correspondence system.

A large problem in small secondary schools, apart from the restricted range of subjects, is the lack of continuity of subject matter. Often teachers are allocated subjects that they are not qualified to teach due to the limited number of staff available. The narrow range of subjects, furthermore, may not suit the individual educational or vocational requirements of the students. This is especially so where there are no courses offered beyond Grade 10.

There are several alternatives open to the student in this situation. He may attend a boarding school where appropriate courses are available. He may travel to the nearest regional centre where his desired courses are offered or he may enrol in a correspondence course. However, in this case, the student suffers loss of peer and teacher contact. Thus, in order to provide a comprehensive education program of generally acceptable standard, the Committee *recommends that State education authorities consider the possibility of lowering the teacher-pupil ratio in small country secondary schools and of introducing promotional incentives for teachers undertaking country service.*

Multi-Racial Education

The Committee found that there are special problems relating to the education of mixed groups, especially where the school has a majority of Aboriginal children. This occurs principally in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The Committee considers that the need exists for a special inquiry relating to Aboriginal children, as their social, educational and vocational needs differ radically from those of other children.

In the more remote areas where the Aborigines live largely in a tribal environment, the usual program and school curriculum has little relevance to the way of life for the Aboriginal child. Teachers are not trained to meet the special needs of these children. There is a shortage of Aboriginal teachers and teachers able to teach English as a second language.

In the Northern Territory, prior to 1975, isolated European children had the choice of attending the nearest Aboriginal settlement school or enrolling in the School of the Air. Now, departmental policy states that children must attend the nearest government school – this category includes settlement schools – and children may not enrol in the School of the Air unless special permission is given by the regional education authority. Moreover, if children go to boarding school without the permission of the authority, they are not entitled to receive the government allowance.

Thus white children attending government schools with predominantly Aboriginal enrolment are badly disadvantaged as school activities are oriented towards the needs of the Aboriginal child. The Committee states that if there is to be no freedom of choice as to which school a child attends, then where both European and Aboriginal children attend the same

school, it is essential that the school be adequately staffed and equipped to meet the specific needs of both groups.

The Committee considers that equality of opportunity can only be achieved through different educational provisions. It is *recommended that the Commonwealth Government review its education policy in the Northern Territory to ensure equal educational opportunity for both Aboriginal and European children.* The Committee further *recommends that the State Governments examine their policies as they affect the educational needs of children in multiracial communities in isolated areas.*

BOARDING FACILITIES FOR ISOLATED CHILDREN

Hostels

The standard of hostel accommodation varies markedly throughout Australia. In most States, hostels receive State Government finance or subsidy, but are organised and run by church bodies such as the CWA, shire councils, the YMCA and various other bodies.

Despite the receipt of either State or Commonwealth subsidies, the greater part of running costs of these hostels has to be met by the organising body. With the rising cost of living, of salaries for staff, of rental for premises and so on, most hostel boarding fees tend to be high. In some cases, fees for private board are higher than at an actual boarding school. There are also several other problems to be considered by hostel management as being contributive to the presently high number of hostel vacancies. Most local authorities also find problems in employing suitably trained staff and paying them adequate salaries.

With unfavourable economic conditions, isolated families are finding that it is too costly to have one or more children boarding away from home. Parents need their children to help on the farms. Furthermore, most parents show little confidence in standards of hostel supervision, while general lack of suitable recreation and study facilities in hostels serve to compound this mistrust of hostel life.

School bus services have improved greatly over the past decade, so that some isolated children can now commute daily to school. However, there remains a certain number of children too remote to travel the distance to school, and who also live outside of the broadcast range of the School of the Air. In these areas, mail deliveries are slow and irregular, thus rendering correspondence courses inadequate. These children, then, are effectively excluded from gaining a good education unless they board in regional centres.

Thus the hostel fulfils a significant role in the education of these children. The Committee therefore *recommends that a study of the present and future demand for accommodation facilities for children in country areas throughout Australia be undertaken as soon as possible.* Also, *funds should be made available through State education authorities in the form of increased per capita grants to registered residential establishments to subsidise the cost of upgrading and maintaining the existing hostels in country areas.*

Independent Boarding Schools

Most independent boarding schools are concentrated in metropolitan areas. These may be attended by the children of isolated families in the event that there are no secondary school facilities within access of the student's home, or that suitable accommodation is lacking in the regional centre with a high school where the student would otherwise attend.

At the time of the Committee's investigations, most boarding schools had a large number of vacancies for students. With the economic depression in the rural sectors, many families have been unable to afford the cost of boarding and tuition fees at independent schools. The lack of suitable school alternatives for the children of these families means that they become educationally disadvantaged. The Committee suggests that the quality of children's education should not be determined by their parents' economic circumstances. Therefore, consideration should be given to using existing independent boarding school facilities to accommodate isolated school children by providing financial assistance for both boarding and tuition fees, the latter in lieu of provision of free and appropriate State education within reasonable distance of the child's home, so that the facility of adequate education is available to all isolated children, regardless of parents' income.

Agricultural High Schools

These schools are regional residential high schools which offer basic training in practical agriculture for future farmers and farm workers. There is a total of 12 such schools in Australia. The Committee considers that inequities exist with these schools since entrance is reliant on academic qualifications, and this discriminates against isolated children who have had to complete primary courses by correspondence without qualified guidance or supervision. Girls are excluded from these schools. However, it was seen as important that these agricultural schools continue, with a view to the specific needs of isolated children from rural areas and the rural industry.

Private Board and Second Homes

The Committee *recommends that private board be investigated as an alternative boarding facility for isolated school children.* In Canada, a register is kept of inspected private board homes, and families are paid a grant or allowance for the provision of foster home care for isolated children. The children have the advantage of living in a family environment, and standards of care are strictly enforced to safeguard the children's interests and well-being.

The term second home refers to the situation where the mother and children of an isolated family move to a regional centre and establish a household to enable the children to attend school daily. The father of the family remains at the isolated home of the family. Allowances are paid to support the family in the second home, but these are designed to barely cover costs of the

household. Apart from financial difficulties, the second home arrangement often produces marital problems between the parents, and division of the family is not considered healthy. However, the Committee *recommends that the payment of second home assistance under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme be continued and that levels of assistance be reviewed annually.*

Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme

Children who have to live away from home to attend school are eligible for financial assistance from the Commonwealth Government under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme. Children who qualify for this assistance include geographically isolated children, handicapped children, students doing specific courses or needing specialised remedial tuition, children who require special diagnostic testing, children of itinerant families and those of families who move from one region to another during the school year. Boarding allowances are given, but are subject to means test and this eliminates many families who genuinely require assistance. Maximum allowance per student per year is $1000 for primary students and $1150 for secondary students. However, it is shown that these amounts are unrealistic and inadequate as the continually rising cost of living and boarding fees far exceeds the maximum allowance. The Committee sees financial assistance as a poor alternative to providing suitable education facilities in rural areas, but recognises the need for continuing the assistance. The Committee therefore *recommends that the payment of benefits under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme be continued and that levels of assistance and application of the means test for additional allowances be reviewed annually so that allowances are paid at a rate commensurate with education expenditure.* The Committee further *recommends that the Government examine the taxation deductions presently allowable for educational expenses incurred by parents with a view to increasing the maximum deduction allowable.*

Since parents of isolated children are required to meet education expenses higher than those of the non-isolated family due to lack of local school facilities, the Committee considers it reasonable that such expenses be tax deductible for the rural and isolated family.

State Government Assistance

With the introduction of the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme by the Commonwealth in 1973, many States abolished their own assistance schemes altogether. Other States modified allowances paid and varied eligibility criteria. Thus a wide variation exists between States as to type and extent of allowances available.

In Queensland, all State Government allowances were initially discontinued. Later reintroduction of a restructured scheme of allowances means that Queensland presently pays the most generous State allowances. There is a Remote Area Allowance which is paid to the parents of isolated children, free of means test. Also, a Student Allowance is available, subject to means test, for living away from home. In addition, 500 Senior Remote Area Scholarships are awarded to Grades 11 and 12 students to assist them to complete their schooling. Award criteria for the scholarships include scholastic ability and financial need of the family. The allowance is paid to the school to assist with boarding and tuition fees. All allowances in Queensland are paid in addition to the Commonwealth Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme.

In other States, allowances vary. In some areas, only a travelling allowance is available, while elsewhere, supplementary boarding assistance is paid. Application of means tests varies. The Committee *recommends that the Australian Education Council examine the Commonwealth and State Governments' relative responsibilities for the education of isolated school children with a view to formulating what their separate responsibilities should be.* The Committee further *recommends that each State education department examine the disparities between the various State schemes of assistance for isolated school children with a view to rectifying anomalies.*

EDUCATION BY CORRESPONDENCE

Primary Correspondence System

A relatively small proportion of isolated children are enrolled in correspondence courses, which operate as an alternative form of schooling where no appropriate school facilities are available.

The Investigating Committee found in the accumulation of its evidence that present correspondence facilities are considerably inadequate and an unacceptable alternative to school. Deficiencies lie in course materials and teaching methods, and operation of the course is dependent on steadily decreasing postal services. Other methods of correspondence communication through air, rail and road deliveries are diminishing in frequency due to rising costs, and families in remote areas are becoming effectively more isolated. Thus the time lapse between receipt of an exercise and eventual return of the corrected lesson to the child is increasing, minimising continuity and relevance of lessons and courses. The Committee therefore *recommends that the Commonwealth Government review as a matter of urgency those decisions which have resulted in making mail delivery services financially prohibitive for families in remote areas.*

In some areas, correspondence courses have been allied to schools of the air in recent years. In these instances the written lesson leaflet is supplemented by pictures and cassette tapes. This appears to be effective and beneficial to the students, but there remains a number of isolated children out of broadcast range of the school of the air. These children need to be drawn into the 'peer group' of isolated children by other means. A school camp is an example of one activity which can be used to achieve this end.

Despite such attempts at innovation, correspondence schools still have a highly formal approach to education. There is a need to introduce on a much wider scale the use of tapes, films and records, and

other audio-visual devices to keep pace with the expectations and experience of the isolated child, and to provide an education similar, if not equal, to that received by the non-isolated child.

The Committee therefore *recommends that as a matter of urgency a revision of correspondence material be undertaken by the State correspondence schools in consultation with school of the air staff, parent-supervisors and staff representing special education facilities.* The Committee further *recommends that the Curriculum Development Centre provide an information and advisory service to State education authorities in respect of the development of curricula and the introduction of suitable educational aids and materials for correspondence schools.*

Not only are correspondence students geographically isolated but they are also socially and culturally isolated through lack of contact with a peer group and absence of sporting and academic competition.

Some States have experimented with decentralised regional correspondence schools and centres, where students attend on a residential basis for a few weeks of the year. They have the opportunity there for personal and teacher assistance, peer group contact and so on. Similarly, annual school camps allow children social and cultural activities and contacts – these are arranged by the school of the air and the correspondence school. Emphasis is on physical education, group activities and excursions, with a minimum of schoolwork.

Not all isolated children can attend, as subsidies do not extend to travel costs although accommodation costs are covered. The Committee *recommends that all State governments consider subsidising travel costs associated with attendance at school camps for isolated children.*

In most cases, isolated students doing courses are supervised by their parents. But a majority of parent-supervisors are untrained and no teaching manual is issued to them. Thus the problems of the parent-supervisor are many. For example, parents often have limited education and this reduces their effectiveness as teachers. This becomes more evident in the upper grades as courses become more difficult and specialised. Parents also find difficulty in assessing the comparative standard of their children's work. Another problem is the incompatibility of teacher and parental roles. Supervision often leads to the damaging of parent/child relationships which in turn may cause marital and home problems.

Recently a few short courses have been held to give parent-supervisors instruction and support. However, these were poorly attended. Because the courses were held in metropolitan areas, travel and accommodation costs were high and only partly reimbursed. The Committee *recommends that short training courses for supervisors of correspondence pupils be conducted in regional centres prior to the commencement of each school term.* These courses would be conducted by the State correspondence schools in co-operation with schools of the air and local education authorities. The Committee also *recommends that training programs be designed to advise supervisors on teaching methods and applications of educational aids and materials, to assist with comprehension of curricular material and to identify and discuss specific supervisory problems.*

Before the introduction of the services of the schools of the air, extensive use was made of a system of itinerant teachers. This scheme has been reintroduced in Western Australia, to make contact with and assist those children who are very remote – those out of range of the School of the Air broadcasts and isolated by poor mail and delivery services. The Committee considers this a viable and properly organised scheme, and *recommends that State governments consider an extended and more efficient use of itinerant teachers.*

In other States where itinerant teachers are no longer employed, many isolated families employ a governess to supervise children in their correspondence courses. This enables the mother of the family to attend to other duties and assist in the work of the station or property. Under the Commonwealth Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme an allowance is paid to the family in the form of reimbursement of expenditure incurred in the employment of the governess. This allowance is up to $150 per annum and is in addition to the basic correspondence allowance of $200. However it is obvious that this sum is totally inadequate to assist with the cost to the family of employing a governess. Thus the Committee *recommends that the component of the Correspondence Allowance paid as reimbursement of expenditure on the employment of a governess or domestic help be increased and regularly reviewed by the Commonwealth Government.* The Committee also *recommends that all State education authorities conduct appropriate training courses for governesses which should be designed to meet the demands of the teacher-supervisor role.*

Obtaining access to library facilities is a further problem for the isolated child. It is difficult to borrow publications and other references. This is a severe disadvantage in an education system which is geared to encourage children to find out for themselves. The Committee considers that unless children have access to a relatively wide range of references, they cannot be said to have had equal opportunity. So the Committee *recommends that correspondence schools build up their library resources to enable them to meet the needs of isolated students for reference material concurrent with their reading and comprehension ability.*

The Committee continues to *recommend that where possible the development of library facilities in country areas be undertaken in conjunction with local school authorities and the State library services to provide a resource centre not only for students, but for the whole community.*

With regard to vocational guidance, the Committee *recommends that all State education departments ensure that their vocational guidance services are as comprehensive for isolated students as they are for other*

students. This is because isolated children are not exposed to alternative life styles, due to lack of opportunity to interact socially with other people. This is seen as potentially restrictive in their later choice of career, especially careers unrelated to the rural industry. It is necessary that the isolated student be well informed about careers and fields which may be open to him, and to be given assistance to choose that course of study which will best equip the student for his choice.

Secondary Correspondence

As with primary correspondence, there exists considerable variation in standards of secondary correspondence instruction between the States. In Western Australia, however, a private scheme is being tested.

This scheme, termed the Open Learning Matriculation Studies Project, is at present available only to a restricted number of students with teacher supervision. If it is successful in these terms, the scheme will be extended to more remote areas.

The course offers eight subjects. Lessons are well presented and each student is given a mobile locker with built-in cassette player and audio-visual material and equipment storage. Most students choose to do six subjects.

At present, most States have a restricted range of secondary studies. The need exists for a higher standard of course study and instruction so that correspondence becomes an acceptable alternative form of education for the isolated secondary school child.

The Committee therefore *recommends that State education authorities examine the Western Australian Open Learning Matriculation Studies Project with a view to assessing its value and application to their States.*

Pre-School Correspondence

Isolated children younger than five years old have little opportunity for the acquisition of basic communication skills through pre-school experience. Even the correspondence pre-school requires that a child be five years old before enrolling.

The Committee suggests that the correspondence system be expanded to include greater pre-school instruction as in Queensland, where letters and cassettes are exchanged by parents and teachers, and parent participation is fundamental. The program is directed towards learning through a 'play' situation.

An alternative means of providing for kindergarten for isolated children is through the supply of mobile kindergartens. These work well in serving the isolated communities in Tasmania, but the question arises as to the viability of the idea in the larger, more sparsely populated States. The Committee supports the extension of pre-school correspondence programs, but strongly *recommends that priority should be given to upgrading existing primary and secondary correspondence education facilities.*

Schools of the Air

These schools operate as a supplement to the correspondence schools. The present role of the schools of the air in the education of isolated children could be greatly extended and increased. The emphasis is primarily on fostering social and oral development of isolated children, but the only broadcast frequencies available to the schools of the air are those of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. In view of this severe lack of frequencies for exclusive use of the schools, the Committee *recommends that the Commonwealth Government initiates discussions with the State Governments with the aim of making available frequencies especially for schools of the air broadcasts.*

Recent problems have arisen with a mandatory changeover of transceiver type. This has caused hardship and inconvenience for many isolated families who rely on their transceivers to communicate with other people. The Committee offers *two recommendations* for solution of these problems:

1. *That the Commonwealth Government, as a matter of urgency, investigates whether State Governments have enough SSB transceivers to meet the needs of all schools of the air and grants to the States whatever amount is needed to remedy any deficiencies;* and
2. *That families who lease SSB transceivers from schools of the air for educational purposes be permitted to use them for other purposes for the duration of the lease.*

There is no training course available for teachers of the schools of the air. Teachers should be competent in the teaching and assessing of children in a highly abnormal 'classroom' situation, and they should have a good knowledge of radio and broadcasting techniques. The Committee suggests that a system of regular transfers into and out of the schools of the air should be implemented to ensure a flow of new ideas and fresh approach in the schools. Furthermore, the Committee *recommends that all correspondence schools and schools of the air facilities be extended, modernised and co-ordinated to meet the community's changing expectations of education in order to reach a standard comparable with that offered by government schools.*

Television and Video-Cassettes

Most isolated children are presently beyond television range, so the use of television in education of these children is a project of the future.

The use of video-cassettes however, is viable. Only a relatively small number of isolated families in remote areas would receive the equipment and this would not prove too expensive within the framework of all education spending. Co-ordination with the ABC to produce material is suggested.

The *recommendation* of the Committee allows *that the provision of video-cassette facilities for the education of isolated children be investigated by the relevant Commonwealth education and broadcasting authorities in association with State education departments.*

Commonwealth Government's Correspondence Allowances

The Commonwealth Government pays up to $350 per

means free of means test for isolated students living at home doing full-time correspondence courses for their education. This consists of a payment of $200 and an additional payment of $150 as reimbursement of 'approved expenditure'.

The Committee *recommends that the Commonwealth Government review annually the basic $200 payment of the correspondence allowance to compensate for the effects of inflation and that the criteria of approved expenditure governing payment of the second component of the allowance be reviewed regularly.*

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Isolated children in need of special education are severely disadvantaged by limited available facilities. Children in need of special education fall into two categories. First, there are those children who need long-term specialised training and education programs, and second, those who after a short period of remedial instruction are able to return to their normal school environment.

In the case of the first group, it is often necessary for these children to spend long periods away from home. Parents are required to meet high costs of travel and accommodation if they wish to visit their children during long separations. The Committee considers that institutions offering education and treatment for handicapped children should be heavily subsidised. Segregation of the child from educational peers and from the family for long periods of time should be avoided.

With regard to the second group of children, the Committee received many reports from parents about educational problems associated with learning difficulties. In the case of isolated children, the Committee considers that a large proportion of educational problems are attributable to poor curricular material and instruction methods of correspondence courses. There exists a need for further decentralisation of correspondence centres. This will mean that isolated children will have easier access to specialist assistance and special education facilities.

The Committee *recommends that all correspondence school students have access to trained personnel and diagnostic facilities.*

In Western Australia, a metropolitan residential centre for short-term remediation of learning difficulty problems of isolated children has been set up. They have achieved success in the first year of operation. Parents and teachers are encouraged to stay at the centre also to become familiar with skills in the detection and handling of learning difficulty problems. The Committee *recommends that accommodation be made available in centres where remedial education is available and that associated travel costs be met by State education authorities.* The Committee further *recommends that the correspondence schools introduce special instruction leaflets, teaching aids and training courses for parent-supervisors.*

TRANSPORT FACILITIES AND CONVEYANCE ALLOWANCES

The inaccessibility to and problems with school bus services make the disadvantages of isolation greater. Poor roads which are impassable in wet weather, the effect of long-distance travel on children and the inadequacy of travel allowances are some of the problems faced by the isolated family. Poor transport services have a markedly detrimental effect on a child's education.

However, there has been expansion and improvement in bus services to remote areas over the last 15 years. Thus more children are able to get to schools now than a decade ago. This is witnessed by the increase in numbers in some areas of regional schools.

The provision of bus services is an important means by which the educational disadvantages of isolation from school facilities may be overcome and by which the viability of schools in country areas may be maintained. But conveyance allowances vary considerably between States and the Committee considers that States should provide at least reasonable services as compensation for lack of facilities of the standard enjoyed by metropolitan or non-isolated children. Thus the Committee *recommends that each State education department examine the disparities between the various State schemes of travel assistance for isolated children with a view to rectifying the anomalies in the schemes.*

CONCLUSION

The inquiry has shown that the problems relating to the education of children living in the isolated areas of Australia have been shown to be serious, diverse and widespread.

Concern for the educational standards and accomplishments of the next generation has been expressed in many and various ways. This concern has not only included such matters as the quality of life, but has become strongly associated with questions related to the necessary and productive development of Australia's isolated areas. Families must be encouraged to live and work in the isolated regions and must also be enabled to stay there without disadvantage.

Therefore, the exercise of the inquiry has been more than an educational inquiry. It has been an activity of national importance which has involved the areas of social welfare, economic development, cultural advance and community stability.

It follows that if Australia is to benefit from total national development there must be interdependence between the isolated part and the rest of the Australian community. If this interdependence is recognised and understood, there will be a wider appreciation of the necessity for the provision of funds and facilities for the education of isolated school children.

But what will happen if the present disadvantages of living in isolated areas are not alleviated? Already people are leaving these areas. The Australian community must ask itself whether it will continue to accept this situation.

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